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141424Z Dec 04

ACTION DRL-00

INFO LOG-00 AF-00 EAP-00 EUR-00 UTED-00 TEDE-00 NEA-00  
P-00 SA-00 SAS-00 /000W  
-----94B763 142249Z /62

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9565

UNCLAS PARIS 008949

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KIRF](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER VILLEPIN DISCUSSES ANTI-SEMITISM  
WITH U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM REPRESENTATIVES

Sensitive but unclassified. Protect accordingly.

1. (U) Summary: Throughout his meeting with United States Holocaust Memorial Museum officials on November 19, Interior Minister Villepin underlined the GOF determination to fight anti-Semitism in every way possible. Villepin decried the rise in the number of anti-Semitic acts in France, commented on the recently released Rufin report on anti-Semitism, reviewed judicial action against perpetrators of anti-Semitic acts, and outlined measures he will propose to further combat anti-Semitism. The Interior Minister also highlighted the growing concern about the rise in anti-Semitism across Europe. End Summary.

#### RISE IN ANTI-SEMITIC ACTS

2. (U) On November 19, French Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin met with visiting U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum director Sara Bloomfield and museum officials Paul Shapiro and Radu Ioanid. Villepin began the meeting by noting that there had been 166 violent anti-Semitic acts committed during the first ten months of the year. While 10 or 11 of those could be attributed to elements of the extreme right, and approximately 50 more were committed by individuals of Maghreb or Arab origin, the perpetrators and motives are unclear for more than 100 of these incidents. Villepin posited that many of these incidents are likely the work of individuals copying crimes who may be confused about their own motive for attacking Jews and Jewish sites. Villepin noted that, while there had been almost identical numbers of Jewish and Muslim cemeteries desecrated in recent months, there had been many more Christian churches attacked. However, many Church authorities do not report or draw attention to such attacks to avoid copycats.

3. (U) In response to a question on the effect of foreign events on the rise in anti-Semitic acts in France, Villepin acknowledged that the rate of incidents increased dramatically after the beginning of the second Intifada in September/October 2000. However, Villepin stated, the plight of the Palestinians is not the main cause of anti-Semitism in France; most North African and Arab youths in France have little understanding of the situation in the region. Rather, he continued, anti-Semitism is a result of feelings of rejection and the lack of identity of some groups on the fringes of society. Villepin's analysis tracks with the conclusions of the recently released report on anti-Semitism in France by noted humanitarian Jean-Cristophe Rufin that Villepin had requested in June. Villepin also cited the Rufin report in making the link between the extreme left and anti-Semitism, noting that strong anti-Zionist sentiment can veer into anti-Semitism.

#### GOF ACTION AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

4. (U) Villepin insisted that the GOF is committed to combating anti-Semitism in every way possible. The GOF reacts quickly, strongly, and publicly after anti-Semitic incidents. Additionally, the GOF has launched education initiatives, brought together religious groups for inter-faith dialogue, and created an inter-ministerial committee that serves as a model for other EU countries. On the judicial front, Villepin stated that punishments for anti-Semitic acts have been increased, although these toughened punishments must be applied to be effective. Villepin also added that judges are increasingly giving harsher sentences. Currently, the Interior Ministry is working closely with the Justice Ministry on a special program to combat cyber-crime, and the GOF plans to monitor the internet for hate sites.

#### FOREIGN FUNDING OF MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS

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15. (U) Villepin then turned to the problem of foreign funding of French Muslim organizations. He noted that donating money is an important part of Islam, and, in many parts of the world, it is the fundamentalist groups that provide social services to the needy. Villepin stressed the need to find a different and open financing structure to make sure social work in France is not coming from radical groups, citing efforts to create a system for receiving and collecting money from foreign governments and citizens that would help negate direct funding and, therefore, influence from abroad. Such a foundation would also allow the money to be directed to organizations known to be free of radical ties. Villepin also pointed out that French intelligence closely monitors the speeches of imams to ensure that they are not spreading violent sermons, and he spoke of the need to educate imams in the French language, institutions, and culture. (Note. This meeting took place as Villepin was unveiling the GOF's plan to facilitate the funding of mosques through the establishment of a foundation, details of which

will be reported septel. End note.)

#### HOLDING FIRM AGAINST ENCROACHMENT ON REPUBLIC IDEALS

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16. (SBU) Perhaps most insightful were Villepin's closing comments concerning the law banning religious symbols in schools, which he said has been "unfairly" referred to in the media as the "veil law." He noted that he had met with three Muslim groups before the beginning of the school year, telling them he would not tolerate opposition to the law and warning that he would vigorously combat any group that encouraged girls to wear headscarves or offered lawyers to fight the law. "You must understand that first and foremost these groups want to be legitimate. That is why we must say 'no.' If you give them this much (indicating the first knuckle on his index finger), they will demand this much (indicating second knuckle). That is why you must be forceful and say 'no.' Keep them here (pointing to end of finger). We must stick strictly to the rules of the Republic. If we don't go by the book, we will be swallowed up. If we are not strict about what they can and can't do, they will impose their own rules."  
Leach

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